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THE IRON CURTAIN

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent. Behind the line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe: Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia. All these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I might call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high, and in some cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow.

-- Winston Churchill, Fulton,
Missouri, 5 March 1946

The borders of Russia were closed after the 1917 revolution. By decree the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars in June 1927 authorized the strip system of border zones and obstacles that has become the pattern for the Iron Curtain as we now know it. The system was extended to the European Satellites after World War II and border controls were reinforced. Today it also embraces the Bamboo Curtain in the Far East.

Despite the Communists' recent declarations that they favor international contact and that the Iron Curtain does not exist, an effective system of physical barriers and administrative controls bars all but regime-approved and supervised crossings between East and West.

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Even while the leaders speak of increasing tourism, the rusty barbed-wire entanglements on the Austro-Hungarian border are being replaced by new, double entanglements. New mine fields and new towers with heavy caliber machine guns have been reported. Similar additions have been noted on the Czechoslovak-West German border.

The Curtain

The Iron Curtain is more than 16,000 miles long, in addition to the USSR's arctic and Pacific coasts, and the Bloc country borders are patrolled by more than 409,000 troops, plus the security forces of Communist China. The Curtain stretches along the borders of the Communist countries from the USSR-Finnish border down through the middle of Europe, across the Balkans, through Central Asia and up through Asia to encompass mainland China, North Vietnam, North Korea, the Kuriles and Sakhalin--to seal the peoples of the Communist countries from all contact with the rest of the world.

The Iron Curtain can be seen and touched. It has been photographed and sections of its barriers have been charted. Its physical reality is attested to by barbed wire, armed

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patrols with guns, plowed and mined strips of land. Listening posts, towers, electric detection devices and forbidden zones enforce the inviolability of the borders of Satellites and the USSR.

Other barriers and controls behind the Iron Curtain form an additional series of curtains sealing Communist country from Communist country. In fact, the curtain around the USSR itself is as thick and impenetrable as the band of Satellite countries around it. Within each country and the USSR the Iron Curtain is buttressed by rigid controls: numerous documents required of each person, check points, regular inspections, surprise investigations, intricate agent networks and informers throughout the population. Communications with the outside world also are checked. Restrictions on movements in the interior of each Communist Bloc country make even reaching the border extremely difficult.

The very laws of the USSR and the Satellites belie the Cominform journal's protestations that the Iron Curtain is a "malicious fabrication." The Iron Curtain was established by Communist regime law and is enforced by that law. The criminal codes, laws, decrees and regulations outline the measures and physical obstacles to be used to seal the borders and provide heavy penalties for border crossers,

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for any who give them assistance and for relatives left behind. Border troops are instructed to keep the boundaries they guard under constant observation at all times and to permit no crossings. Legal crossing points are closely guarded, permits and control documents thoroughly checked, luggage and at times persons inspected.

Criminal Codes and Border Regulations

The Criminal Code of the Russian Federated Republic, pattern for other USSR republics, defines flight from the USSR as an act of treason punishable by death before a firing squad. It provides sentences of 5 to 10 years in a labor camp for adult relations of military personnel fleeing abroad if they knew of escape plans and a 5-year exile in Siberia if they did not. The basic law for USSR border guards was passed in 1927 and has been elaborated by later laws. It established the curtain on all USSR borders, authorizing four belts of varying depths, including cleared strips, patrol paths and restricted areas, and authorizing document checks, vehicle inspections and house search. It also authorized ambush points and concealed posts in the border zones.

The pattern of these patrols and physical barriers as put into effect has varied widely from the letter of the

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law, because of terrain, climate and other factors, but the effective sealing of the borders has carried out the intent.

In May 1952 the East German Government instructed the Ministry of State Security "to take immediately strict measures to reinforce the guarding of the demarcation line between the German Democratic Republic and the Western occupation zones of Germany...." The Ministry that same month published a regulation establishing a five-kilometer blocked zone along the international frontier and the Baltic coast. A 1954 Ministry of Interior regulation for the Border Guards listed arms and observation equipment, technical devices for barriers and control strips, signal devices and observation posts to be used by the sentries, roving patrols, camouflaged guards, ambush guards, search parties and inland security guards.

Poland's basic law of 1927 on frontier control was amended by a 1948 decree to double the severity of the penalty for border crossings, and the system of regulations and physical barriers has been thoroughly elaborated since then. A 1948 Rumanian law provides for 3 to 10 years imprisonment and 4,000-40,000 lei fine for illegal entry or departure, or for assistance to border crossers. A 1953

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amendment to Bulgaria's Criminal Code made flight beyond the border punishable by death, and reportedly provided up to 10 years imprisonment for persons who know of escape attempts and do not report them. Family members of legal age left behind by escapees may be deprived of their civil rights and property. A 1952 edition of the Communist Party organ Rabotnichesko Delo declared that Bulgaria's frontiers with the "imperialist world" had been converted into a "fortress." Albania also strengthens its separate section of the Curtain with elaborate controls, prohibited areas, plowed strips, a trench and barbed-wire system and severe measures against the families of escapees.

Travel Controls

Theoretically passports and international travel documents are available to European Bloc citizens. In reality, however, travel outside these countries, across the Curtain, has been denied to nearly all but government officials and state-sponsored groups. The issuance of a passport depends on exit and re-entry permits, visa, foreign currency authorization, police, health and other certificates, and denial of any one of these prerequisites easily places the passport out of reach of the average citizen. Travel from Bloc country to Bloc country or to the Free World appears to be permitted to some extent in the Asiatic Satellites,

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but has been limited to persons considered politically reliable or politically harmless and whose absence would not be detrimental to the economy of the country.

Residence regulations and employment registration deny travel to all but a very limited number of people within the Soviet Union and European Satellites. Unauthorized absence from work is a serious offense against the state; every person away from his job or home must be able to explain his travel status by leave permit, transfer order, entry in his personal documents or other official document. Citizens of Asiatic Satellites often are required to obtain special travel permits, sometimes even if they go no further than a neighboring village.

Physical Characteristics of the Curtain

Sectors of the Iron Curtain, even along the border of one country, vary widely in their patrol and obstacle patterns. The Curtain is constantly being strengthened, and the system from border district to border district is changed often. Reports by escapees during the past five years, however, repeatedly describe variations of the barbed-wire fence--even between Satellite countries--backed by strips of land plowed and raked to show footprints; armed patrols which may be mounted or on foot and may be accompanied by trained dogs; watchtowers surveying the boundary and its

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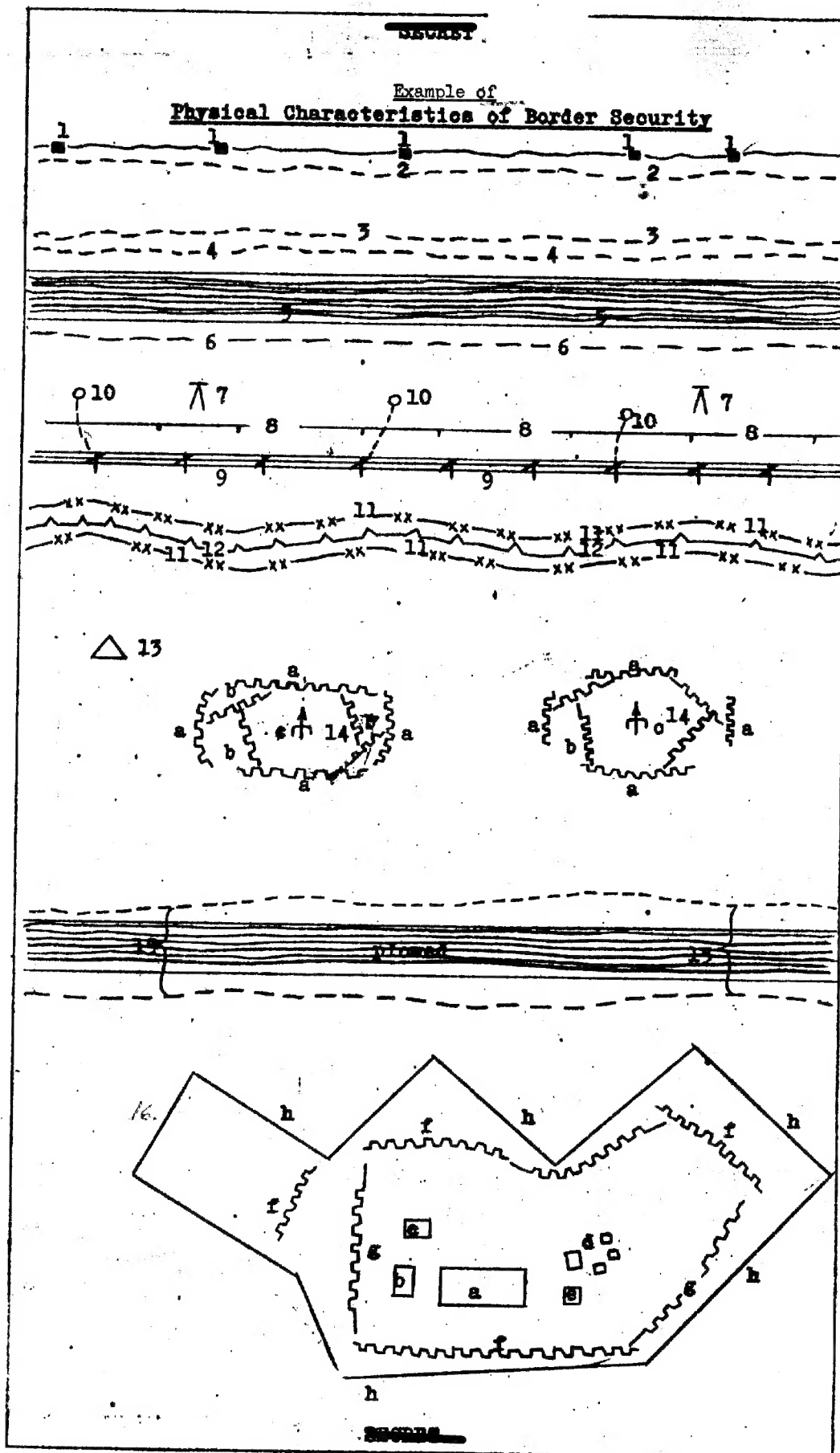
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approaches and equipped sometimes with searchlights and usually with telephone or radio; hidden or open electric detection devices; mines and snares at strategic points; and nearly always a series of evacuated and/or forbidden areas.

Where natural barriers impede boundary crossings, the patrols and man-built obstacles may be fewer and less elaborate; where the Iron Curtain touches Western Europe, it is heavily guarded and reinforced.

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Example of Physical Characteristics of Border Security

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1. Border pillars (stakes).
2. Officers' Path: 2-5 m. behind the border pillars, for officers to check the condition of the pillars.
3. NCO's path: 100-300 m. behind the Officers' Path. Covered once or twice daily by an NCO with trained search dog.
4. Patrol Path: 2-5 m. behind the NCO's path. Covered four times daily by patrols to check for footprints on the plowed strip.
5. Control-Tracing Strip: usually 300-400 m. from the border, of freshly plowed earth 10-12 m. wide.
6. Patrol Path.
7. Wooden observation towers.
8. Electrical detection devices.
9. Telegraph and telephone poles.
10. Socket outlets for telephones.
11. Barbed wire.
12. Electric Detection Device.
13. Covered observation post.
14. Deployment defense lines for the border company.
15. Second Control Tracing Strip.
16. Company area.

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Communist and Non-Communist Statements

In recent years much has been said about the need for raising the Curtain as a step toward ending the cold war and toward peace. Prominent leaders from both sides of the Iron Curtain made statements on the problem at the 1955 Geneva Meeting at the Summit. Before the meeting, in a speech at Rutland, Vermont, on 22 June 1955, President Eisenhower said:

We merely want to live in peace with all the world, to trade with them, to learn from their cultures as they may learn from ours.

At the opening of the Geneva Conference President Eisenhower said:

... friendly understanding between peoples does not readily develop where there are artificial barriers such as now interfere with communication. It is time that all curtains, whether guns or laws or regulations, should begin to come down. But this can only be done in an atmosphere of mutual respect and confidence.

On 22 July the President proposed specifically that the barriers impeding interchange of ideas and opportunities for travel and trade be lifted.

The Communist leaders said they agreed. Premier Bulganin's speech on the opening day of the conference stated that the Soviet Union stood for the "broad development of international contacts and cooperation in culture and science, and for the removal of obstacles impeding the intercourse among nations."

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Back in Moscow on 4 August, Bulganin addressed the Third Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on the results of the Geneva Conference. On the development of contacts between East and West he declared:

Now as always, the Soviet Union favors extensive international cooperation and all-round development of economic, scientific and cultural links between nations. We consider very useful an exchange of delegations among countries and reciprocal visits of people prominent in industry, agriculture, trade, science, art and public figures. We also support the development of tourism.

In discussing the actual proposal approved by the Heads of Government, he added:

Undoubtedly, progress in this sphere which, as far as the relations between the Four Powers are concerned, is far from being adequate, would contribute in a large measure to the lessening of international tension, the strengthening of mutual confidence between states and the development of international cooperation.

The tone was picked up by the Cominform journal which stated in its issue of 12 August:

It is beyond doubt that reciprocal visits, provided they are not prejudiced, will benefit the peoples and help to get rid of all irrelevancies and artificialities, everything that hampers the establishment of friendly relations among countries.

Earlier, on 1 July 1955, the Cominform journal For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy! had insisted that there was no such thing as an Iron Curtain:

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...Thousands of people from many countries of the world who have visited the USSR and seen for themselves the life of the Soviet peoples have become convinced at first hand of the profoundly peaceful aspirations and the sincere desire of the Soviet people to establish mutual understanding and friendship with all peoples; they have become convinced in practice that the notorious "Iron Curtain" is a malicious fabrication of the enemies of the Soviet Union.

Yet the Iron Curtain remains, increasingly formidable and no sector of the Curtain has been raised. Although some have managed to escape from behind it, they are few. Some others have passed through to forward Communist aims, but only with express permission.

Even if the Curtain's border controls and barriers were raised, strict internal controls over the population would remain to check any large-scale or free movement between the still divided East and West.

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